

Curtain Rod System

It Would Be Much Cheaper Than Anti-Ballistic Missiles

By Art Buchwald

IT NOW APPEARS that the United States is going to build an anti-ballistic missile system. For the "thin" size system, it would cost \$3.5 billion to \$5 billion; the "thick" one, which the military are opting for, would cost \$30 billion.

When the news broke, my friend Cruxman called me and said, "Why do we have to spend \$5 billion to build an anti-ballistic missile system?"

"Because, Cruxman," I said, "the Russians are building one and we have to have everything the Russians have."

"How do we know they're building one?" Cruxman demanded.

"Because they said they were building one," I replied, trying to be patient.

"Yeh, well how come if we don't believe the Russians on anything else, we believe them when they say they're building an anti-system ballistic missile?"

"You mean an anti-ballistic missile system. Cruxman, you've got to understand that we would rather not spend the money, but we're being forced into it."

"All right. What about this? Suppose we announce we're building a system missile anti-ballistic, or whatever the hell you call it, and we stick up a bunch of old curtain rods and obsolete television antennas and say, 'This is our defense, Boris, so don't go shooting any of your ICBMs toward North America.'"

"It's a good idea, Cruxman, but you've forgotten one thing—the credibility gap. It's all right to lie to our own people but we can't very well lie to the Soviet Union."

"How are they going to know we're lying?" Cruxman shouted. "As a matter of fact, how do we know they ain't lying?"

"Have you forgotten the 'Spirit of Glassboro' so soon?" I asked Cruxman.

"YEH, WELL let's just suppose," he said, "that they announced they were building their anti-ballistic system missile, just so we would go ahead and spend \$10 billion to \$30 billion on ours. Now suppose after we get it built, the Russkies say, 'Ha, ha, you've wasted all that money because we don't have an anti-ballistic missile system. As a matter of fact, not only don't we have such a defense, but we've just discovered our anti-aircraft barrage balloons don't even blow up so good.' Wouldn't that make us the laughing stock of the Western World?"

"Cruxman, you're only talking about \$30 billion. It's chicken feed."

"Let me ask you this question. They're speaking about a 'thin' ABMS to start with. What are they going to protect with it?"

"I imagine the major cities for a start."

the time they build a defense system, there won't be a major city left standing in the U.S."

"Why is that?"

"Because the cost of making the major cities livable comes to exactly the same price it costs to build a bunch of Nikes around them."

"Cruxman, wiser men than you have been wrestling with this problem for years. We would rather spend the money on other things, but we have no choice. We can't afford to let the Russians bomb our slums out of existence."

"Do me one favor," Cruxman begged. "Ask them over in the Pentagon, just for fun, if they'd stick up some curtain rods and old television antennas over Omaha and see how the Soviet Union reacts. I'll lay you five to one they start putting up curtain rods and old television antennas over Leningrad."

"All right," I promised, "but I don't think I'll have any luck. Once the Defense Department thinks it can get its hands on \$30 billion, it's kind of hard to make them let go."

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